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# Missions Appendix

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# Appendix

## A Missions Theology

By John V. York

Missions theology begins with God's stated plan for history--*the mission of God*<sup>1</sup>--and may be traced by following the major statements of divine intention using the *diachronic methodology* of biblical theology.<sup>2</sup> In this article, *the mission of God* is viewed as the blessing of all peoples through Jesus Christ. God's method to accomplish this mission is by His outbreaching presence among a covenant people. Covenant people are referred to as a Kingdom under God with a mission to bless the nations. This *mission of God* stands as the foundation for a missions theology.

While it is acknowledged that there are promises made by God to national Israel, which still await future fulfillment, a discussion of such promises is beyond the scope of this study. This article focuses on God's mission to all nations, including Israel, that He will accomplish in our time through the Church.

We will trace *the mission of God* from the Pentateuch, the Historical Books together with the poetic and prophetic writings, the Gospels, the Book of Acts, the Pauline and General Epistles, and finally the Book of Revelation.

### MISSIONS IS BORN

Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."<sup>3</sup> This verse implies two great truths foundational to a missions theology.

1. *All races, clans, languages and dialects, male and female are equally the objects of God's redemptive love.* Despite the fall of man (Genesis 3), no people are so sinful that God cannot save them if they repent, and no place is beyond God's love. Any tribal group, after believing, can participate fully in the ongoing *mission of God* to the nations.
2. *Being made in God's image implies the potential to act with authority as vice regents or ambassadors within God's kingdom.* As early as Genesis 2:19,20, Adam's naming of the animals illustrates this point.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Noah represented God when he built the ark. There is, therefore, nothing surprising in God's repeated promise to Abraham that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3; cf. 18:18; 22:18). This "image of God" concept later provides the basis for Christ's commissioning His disciples with authority for worldwide ministry, for the repeated endowment of power for witness upon successive groups throughout the Book of Acts, and for Paul's bold declaration, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). All believers are thus to seek the spiritual enablements provided by God to accomplish His mission (cf. Joel 2:28,29; Acts 1:8; 2:16-18; 1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1,39).

God announced that the seed of the woman would bruise Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). Subsequent history focuses on God's plan to defeat Satan through this promised seed. The Flood demonstrated the jurisdiction of the Creator in judgment over the entire world (Genesis 6-9). Grace, as well, was shown in an everlasting covenant with all living creatures (9:15,16). Many commentators see in Genesis 9:27 a postdeluge promise of the manifest presence of God within the tents of Shem.<sup>5</sup> The table of 70 nations (chapter 10) results from

God's judgment at Babel upon those who in rebellion wished to "make a name" for themselves (11:4). Once the nations were thus established, God called Abraham with the specific mission of bringing blessing to those nations (12:3). God acted alone in a powerful theophany of promise to Abraham (chapter 15). The divine intention is further underscored when God made an "everlasting covenant" with Abraham (17:7). In Genesis 22:18, the phrase "through your seed" was added to the blessing previously promised Abraham in 12:3 and 18:18. The promise to bless the nations through Abraham can be linked with the earlier promise concerning the seed of the woman. This plan is further emphasized when the promise was renewed to Abraham's son Isaac (26:3,4). Still later, God revealed himself to Jacob as the God of Abraham and Isaac, promising to bless all peoples on earth through Jacob's seed (28:13,14). Then at Sinai God entered into a sovereign/vassal covenant with Israel in which Israel promised to serve Him as their King (Exodus 19-40; Leviticus).<sup>6</sup> Exodus 19:6 is a significant passage regarding *the mission of God*: "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Israel, as a "kingdom of priests," was to act corporately as God's agent to bring this blessing to the nations in an early fulfillment of His promise plan. This could be accomplished through the priestly ministries of prayer and proclamation.<sup>7</sup>

## THE KINGDOM IN MISSIONS

In the Book of Joshua, the people moving in covenant with the King were miraculously given a promised land. The land was taken when the people dared to advance in obedience to their King whose presence guaranteed their victory.<sup>8</sup> Territory was allocated to each tribe and had to be possessed (Joshua 13:6; 18:1-10). God then blessed the people with rest, meaning secure borders and freedom from threat from without or within. After Joshua twice renewed the covenant (8:30-35; 24:1-27), the covenant people were set to bless the nations (4:24).

Instead of being a blessing, however, a period of decline is shown in the Book of Judges. The main question about who is really the King is dramatized by the repeating cycles of apostasy, punishment, repentance, and restoration. These cycles bracket the central account in which Gideon declared, "The Lord will rule over you" (Judges 8:23). He is thus contrasted with Abimelech who as an antijudge attempted to usurp the Lord's kingdom (chapter 9).

The stage is thus ready for the calling of David. In 2 Samuel 7:16, David was promised an everlasting Kingdom (Genesis 49:10). It is evident that *the mission of God* involves the eternal Kingdom that will encompass all nations. The promised seed of blessing to the nations will come through David's line.

## LIFE IN THE KINGDOM

*The mission of God* is seen in the Wisdom Literature specifically through the themes of "Kingdom" and "the fear of the Lord."<sup>9</sup>

The royal psalms celebrate the rule of the Lord's anointed King (e.g., Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144). While the kings of Israel/Judah were forbidden to expand their territory beyond the divinely appointed boundaries, these psalms portray the Messiah or Greater David ruling in glorious splendor over all the nations of the earth. The nations, in turn, have been brought under God's covenant as "the people of the God of Abraham" (Psalm 47:9). The entirety of Psalm 67 is given to the theme that the Aaronic benediction of Numbers 6:24-26 had as its objective the extension of the rule and covenant blessing of God to the nations.<sup>10</sup> In Psalm 117 all the nations are exhorted to join in praising *Yahweh* (Israel's covenant name for God).<sup>11</sup> *The mission of God* is seen as accomplished in a special day the Lord makes for this purpose (Psalm 118:22-26). This day began when the stone rejected by the builders became the capstone (verse 22). It ends with a kingly coronation: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (verse 26). Between the rejection and the coronation is the prayer: "O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success" (verse 25). The Psalmist thus anticipated each component of the New Testament day of Christ: His rejection at the Crucifixion, the time of success in proclaiming salvation during the Church Age, and His coronation at the Second Coming.

The Wisdom Literature also teaches the fear of the Lord as being a life of blessing, wisdom, justice, and love (Hebrew, *hesed*) God intends this quality of life to serve as an invitation for the nations to enter His covenant.

## JUDGMENT AND PROMISE

Throughout the centuries of the Old Testament, God's people rebelled against His rule. The bless-the-nations Abrahamic covenant could never be fulfilled by a people rebellious to the Mosaic covenant. It was in this context that God spoke through the prophets to arraign the nation in a covenant lawsuit. For example, in Micah 6:1-8, legal parlance is used to state Yahweh's case against His people.<sup>12</sup> The anointed kings and all the people were guilty of breach of covenant, and all would be judged. Nor were the nations exempt from judgment. Though they were strangers to the promise, they lived in rebellion against the Sovereign Lord of the universe and would be judged.

Against this certainty of universal judgment, the prophets foretold the coming of a Messiah anointed as the Servant of Jehovah who would fully atone for the sins of Israel and the world. Good days were coming but only following national judgment, national repentance, and the coming of the Servant who "will bring justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1).

The prophets insisted that when the kingdom of Jehovah was restored, then all nations would be counted among the redeemed. Isaiah saw the glory of the Servant as being so great that it would be too small a thing to redeem only Israel. Indeed, the light of the gospel would go to the Gentiles, even "to the ends of the earth" (49:6). He further saw God's house as being "a house of prayer for all nations" (56:7). Joel saw the universal outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh so that all who called on the name of the Lord would be saved (Joel 2:28-32). Both Obadiah and Amos saw archenemy Edom as serving the Lord in a revived kingdom (Obadiah 21; Amos 9:11,12). Daniel saw the saints of the Most High receiving God's kingdom, which would crush all other kingdoms and then rule forever (Daniel 2:44; 7:18). Zechariah declared that many nations would be joined to Israel in that day to become God's people among whom God would dwell (Zechariah 2:11).

## THE KING DECLARES HIS MISSION

The Gospels' primary function is that of a royal declaration that the King has now come. Matthew linked the promises to Abraham and David by stating that Jesus descended from both (Matthew 1:1). God's plan is being fulfilled in the Kingdom that is present in the person of the King. Since the promised Kingdom was to embrace all nations, the wise men came from the East to worship Him. Simeon declared that the infant Jesus was "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32).

Jesus advanced the Kingdom theme both in His preaching and in His miracles, openly advertising the international dominion to which His kingdom will grow. He delivered the daughter of a Canaanite woman from demonic oppression (Mark 7:24-30). He healed a Gentile centurion's servant and declared the centurion's faith greater than what could be found among Israel (Matthew 8:5-13). Indeed, many (Gentiles) would "come from the east and the west," but the sons of the Kingdom would remain outside (8:11,12). The unlikely hero to His most famous parable was, not surprisingly, a Samaritan. While Jewish cities were condemned, Jesus boldly stated that their Gentile counterparts would have repented if given equal opportunity (11:21-24).

Harvest is central to Jesus' parables in anticipation of a mission to all nations. The Gospel of John is developed around a carefully selected list of key words and terms all of which are used to imply a Gentile mission. These terms include "word" (*logos*), "world" (*kosmos*), "believe," "all men," "every man," "whosoever," "other sheep," "Greeks," and "so send I you." It was to a Samaritan woman that Jesus first openly revealed His identity as Messiah (John 4). He announced His upcoming crucifixion with the promise that when He was lifted up from the earth, He "will draw all men" unto himself (12:32). Though the Twelve

were initially sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," this limited commission is by nature transitory and is soon subsumed into a much greater commission to all nations (Matthew 10; 28).<sup>13</sup>

## MISSIONS IN ACTION

The outline of the Book of Acts states the anticipated progression of Christ's mission: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). This theme is energized by the events on the Day of Pentecost when the assembled believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and burst out in a chorus of worship--in Gentile languages.<sup>14</sup>

Peter opened the door first to Jews, then to Gentiles. The Spirit then impressed the mixed Jewish-Gentile church at Antioch to send out missionaries (chapter 13). The success of the mission to Gentiles forced the council to consider their place within the Church (chapter 15). James interpreted the prophecy of Amos 9:11,12 to mean that once Jesus was revealed as King, the Gentiles were to be freely admitted as the covenant children of God without adhering to the requirements of Jewish legalism. From this decision, the Church grew rapidly until it reached Rome, the heart of the Gentile empire.

## MISSIONARY CHURCHES AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Paul's epistles were written primarily to solve the problems of the new predominantly Gentile churches. Paul saw himself as a debtor to all men (Romans 1:14) since all have sinned and all alike stand guilty before God. He specifically referred to God as being not only the God of the Jews but "the God of Gentiles too" (3:29).<sup>15</sup> The ancient promise concerning Abraham's seed is applied to Christ in order that the blessing might be for all people (Galatians 3:8,16). The promise from Exodus 19:6 of a "kingdom of priests" is in focus when Paul stated that his priestly duty was to proclaim "the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16). In this same vein, Paul went on to state that his ambition was to preach where the gospel was not yet known (15:20).

In Ephesians, the doctrine of the Church was given in missionary terms: The wall is broken and Jews and Greeks stand on equal footing before God.<sup>16</sup> In 2 Corinthians, Paul longed to go to "the regions beyond" (10:16). To the Philippians, Paul explained that Jesus humbled himself in the nature of a servant so that "every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God" (2:7-11).

Peter also referred to the priestly nature of God's new people in language that brings Exodus to mind (1 Peter 2:9). He then related that the delay in the return of Christ was due to God's patience in waiting for more to be saved. He urged the church to "speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:12).<sup>17</sup> John referred to Christ as "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14).

## THE TRIUMPH OF THE KINGDOM

Finally, the themes of the entire Bible concerning God's mission come together in the Book of Revelation. The "every nation, tribe, people and language" theme is mentioned in 5:9 and 7:9. The term "nations" appears 19 times in Revelation. Christ, the Worthy One, takes up the key of David (3:7), conquering as both the Lamb who was slain and the Lion of the tribe of Judah (chapter 5). In a grand triumphal note, victory is declared: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (11:15). In anticipation of this great victory, a final invitation is issued to all who will heed: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (22:17).

## CONCLUSION

While the diachronic methodology of biblical theology may not reconcile all differences in approach to missions, it helps greatly in identifying the mission of God. What, then, is missions all about? Missions occurs when the Spirit-empowered Church moves out in joyful and deliberate obedience as Christ's ambassadors fulfilling the mission of God to bless the nations.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. The Latin term *missio* Dei is widely used by missiologists when discussing *the mission of God*. (Cf. Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 2-5.)
2. This means that the Bible is viewed by time periods in the order in which it was written. *Diachronic methodology* was developed by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., in *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 5,6,9.
3. Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.
4. Naming the animals implies authority over them. It is God's authority that is entrusted to His representative, Adam. (Cf. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis in The Old Testament Library*, eds. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, Bernhard W. Anderson, James L. Mays [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961], 83; and Eugene H. Merrill "A Theology of the Pentateuch" in *Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, eds. Roy B. Zuck, Eugene H. Merrill, and Darrell L. Bock [Chicago: Moody Press, 1991], 15.) Merrill observes, "When *Yahweh* brought the animals to Adam to see what he would name them, He was in effect transferring from himself to Adam the dominion for which man was created."
5. E.g., Kaiser, 37-39. The passage is seen as a link between the promise of a seed (3:15) and the later promise to Abraham, himself a descendant of Shem.
6. See Roy B. Zuck, ed., *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989) on the topic of sovereign/vassal covenant.
7. Note this twofold concept of priesthood within the New Testament use of this text: proclamation in Romans 15:16 and prayers ("spiritual sacrifices") in 1 Peter 2:5.
8. Jesus' promise in Matthew 28:20 follows His statement of kingly authority (28:18) and His commission (28:19). This is parallel to Joshua, in which *Yahweh* stands as King through the sovereign/vassal treaty of Exodus. Jesus thus invokes the word of *Yahweh* to Joshua in order to equate His authority, mission, and presence as a guarantee of success with that of *Yahweh* to Joshua.
9. No attempt is made in this paper to distinguish between the terms *Poetic Books* and *Wisdom Literature*.
10. Specific reference is made to the extension of the knowledge of *Elohim* to the earth, the salvation of the nations (Psalm 67:2), the praise of "the peoples" for *Elohim* (verses 1,3,5), and the blessed state of the nations as they submit to the rule of *Elohim* (verses 4,5,7). The change from *Yahweh* in Numbers to *Elohim* in Psalm 67 may be a deliberate attempt to acknowledge the nature of the nations being blessed. Although the covenant name *Yahweh* is used in Numbers to a Jewish audience, the change of name in Psalm 67 would seem to be consistent with the wider public being addressed, i.e., people owing allegiance to the Creator though not part of the covenant with Israel.
11. For the nations to praise *Yahweh* is remarkable in that it would seem to indicate total absorption into the covenant people of God.
12. God involves the legal forms of the day to charge His people with breach of covenant. Restoration is then foretold as Messiah (Servant) is coming, and then, true to the original terms of the covenant, God's original purpose to bless the nations will be realized. (Cf. James Luther Mays, *Micah: A Commentary in The Old Testament Library*, eds. Berhard W. Anderson, John Bright, James Barr, and Peter Ackroyd [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976], 132.)
13. For a more detailed treatment of key texts foundational to world missions from the Gospels and Romans, see Robert Duncan Culver, *A Greater Commission: A Theology for World Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).

14. For the significance of these Gentile languages, see Don Richardson, "The Hidden Message of Acts" in *Eternity in Their Heart* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1984), 197-99.
15. For a detailed treatment of the Old Testament's antecedents to Romans 3:29, see David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles, Too* (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, 1994).
16. For a discussion of the relationship in Ephesians between the breaking down of this wall and the missions focus of the ministry gifts, see Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991) 25-84.

For the implications of "speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:12), see Kenneth Barker, gen. ed., "2 Peter 3:12" in *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1903.